

## 5 CONDITIONS ASSESSMENT

This section of the plan offers a summary of physical conditions along the corridor. Information is presented under the following categories:

- Blocks and Lots
- Land Area and Ownership
- Use, Occupancy and Zoning
- Streetscapes and Public Realm
- Transportation and Parking
- Historic Resources (Preliminary Analysis)

### 5.1 Blocks & Lots

The pattern of blocks and lots along H Street exerts a strong influence on the scale and form of development. The existing pattern is a direct legacy of Pierre L'Enfant's Plan (circa 1792) for the District. As with most of the District's lettered streets—with the exception of those leading to public buildings or markets—H Street was designated in the L'Enfant Plan for a ninety foot right-of-way and, eventually, the blocks were subdivided in small lots for residences. By the 1880s, as shown in a city view prepared by Adolph Sachse (circa 1882-1883), the street's early residential character had taken form—the drawing shows the main building of the Sister's of the Poor with the balance of the H Street frontage lined with either 2-3 story townhouses or narrow vacant lots.

Over time, as the surrounding neighborhoods developed and H Street's role as a travel corridor grew, the balance

of uses started to shift from residential to commercial and institutional. By the mid-twentieth century, 2-3 story buildings with commercial storefronts and upper story residential or storage uses occupied virtually all the frontage from 2nd to 15th Streets, with the important exception of churches and institutions.

Blocks along H Street range in length from 270' (the block frontages between 4th and 5th Streets and 5th and 6th Streets) to 770' (the block frontage between 15th and 14th Streets) with typical block frontages measuring 300 to 310 feet. Typical lot sizes, excluding the few blocks with frontage consolidated in single parcels, range in area from 1,600 square feet to 2,500 square feet. Widths of these individual lots fall between 18 and 30 feet with typical depths of between 70 and 100 feet.

### 5.2 Land Area & Ownership

The total area of land with frontage along H Street (parcels between 2nd and 15th Streets plus the Hechinger's Mall and CVS/Old Sears sites) is 1,684,293 square feet or approximately 39 acres. The Hechinger's Mall and CVS/Old Sears sites account for approximately 15 acres of this total area or about 40%. (For comparison's sake, the acreage required for a typical suburban shopping center is between 15 and 20 acres.)

#### Land Area Overview

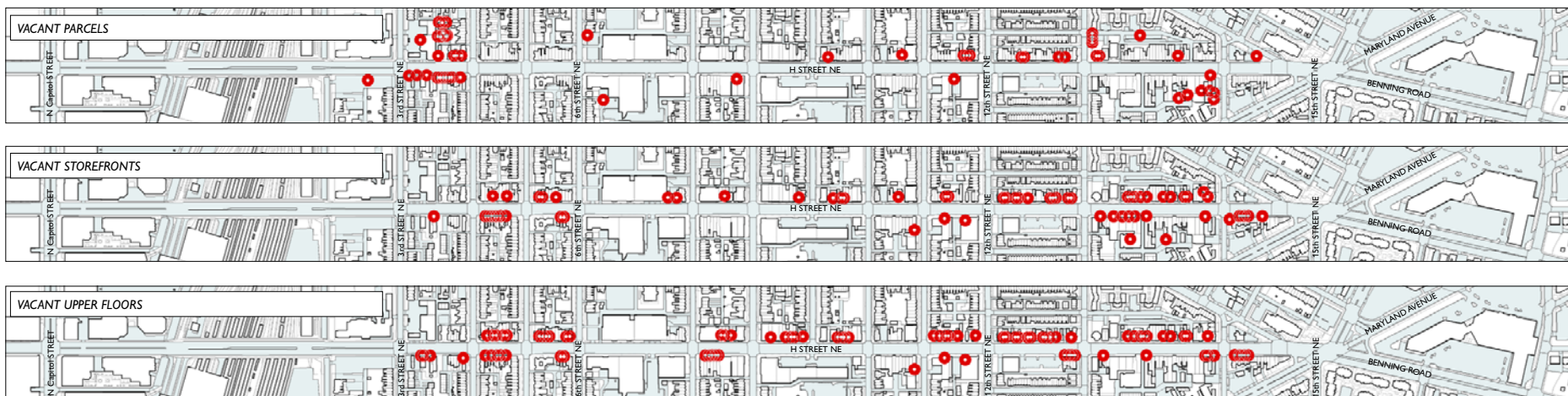
Area	sf	Area avg sf	acres
H Street Frontage	1,017,481	3,595	23.4
Hechinger's Mall & CVS/ Old Sears	666,812	222,271	15.3
Totals	1,684,293	5,889	38.7

Much of the land along the corridor is divided into individual or small blocks of private ownership. Exceptions to this rule include the full-block frontages in single ownership summarized in the following table.

#### Frontage in Single Ownership

Block (Square)	Description	Area (sf)
4493	Hechinger's Mall	373,627
4491	CVS & Former Sears Site	293,185
0859	Site Between 6th & 7th South Side	109,351
0751	Capitol Children's Museum Site	104,756
0912	H Street Connection Site	87,052
0752	Site Between 2nd & 3rd South Side	34,444
0776	BP/Amoco Site	49,052
Total		1,051,467

In addition, several clusters of smaller parcels in common ownership are located along the corridor. The following table identifies these clusters.



Partial Frontages in Single Ownership

Block (Square)	Description	Area (sf)
0858	Murry's/Old Safeway Site	38,628
1004	Auto Zone Site	33,435
1027	Atlas Theater Site	28,950
0858	H Street Self Store Site	26,725
0982	Old McCrorys Site	13,725
1026	District Library Site	10,800
1026	Mid-Block Parking	10,629
0833	H Street CDC Site	9,813
Total		172,705

According to tax assessors records, only 9 parcels along the H Street frontage are held in public ownership, including a one very small parcel (a 5,000 square foot parcel on the Auto Zone block) and 7 contiguous parcels where the library is located.

Parcels Owned by Redevelopment Land Authority

Block (Square)	Description	Area (sf)
0859	Mid-Block Parcel (Parcel 0835)	296
0982	Auto Zone Block (Parcel 0891)	5,456
1026	Library Site (7 contiguous parcels)	10,800
Total		16,552

### 5.3 Use, Occupancy & Zoning

#### Land Use

Property tax records for H Street, including Hechinger Plaza and the CVS/Old Sears sites, show the predominant use of parcels as a mix of retail, restaurant and entertainment uses. Parcels with these uses account for approximately 45% of the total land area along the corridor. Vacant parcels and parcels with fully vacant buildings account for 30% of the total. Office uses rank second accounting for approximately 15% of total land area.

Summary of Existing Land Uses

Use Category	Land Area	%
Residential	3,697	0%
Retail, Restaurant, & Entertainment	691,181	41%
Commercial Office	254,004	15%
Parking & Vehicle Sales	97,629	6%
Public & Institutional	132,815	8%
Vacant Building	124,942	8%
Vacant Parcel	380,025	22%
Total	1,684,293	100%

Source: Property tax records provided by DC Office of Planning.

Note: Property tax records identify land use for parcels, not for building area. Additionally, they do not take into account mixed use buildings, for example, buildings with retail uses on the ground floor and office space above.)

#### Occupancy

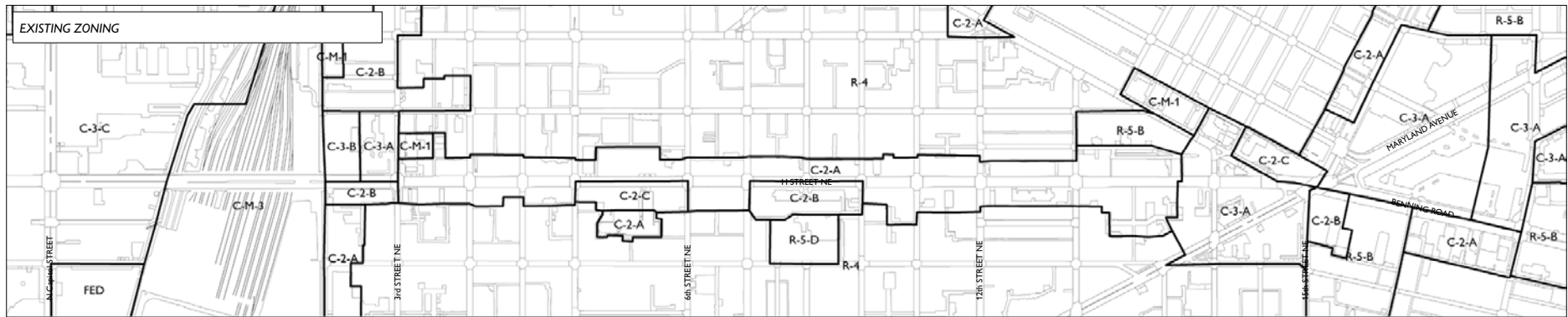
Approximately 380,000 square feet or 23% of the total land area along the corridor is currently vacant. The largest blocks of vacant land are located at the western and eastern gateways of the site. At the eastern end, the Old Sears site accounts for over 200,000 square feet of the corridor's vacant land. At the western end, the BP/Amoco site and the site across H Street from the Capitol Children's Museum account for 50,000 and 35,000 square feet, respectively, of the total. The remaining 95,000 square feet of vacant land is in single sites and small clusters of sites along the corridor.

Occupancy of Parcels

	Area			Parcels	
	sf	Acres	%	#	%
Vacant Parcels	380,025	8.72	23%	54	19%
Occupied Parcels	1,304,268	29.94	77%	232	81%
Total Parcels	1,684,293	38.66	100%	286	100%

Note: Parcels includes H Street Frontage from 2nd Street to 15th Street as well as the Hechinger's Mall site and the CVS/Old Sears site.

Building vacancy is a significant issue along the corridor. Nearly 30% of the corridor's 218 storefront spaces are current unoccupied, and, of the 83 multi-story buildings,



50% have vacant upper floors. Combined, these vacancies represent 285,000 square feet of space—126,000 on the ground floor and 159,000 in upper stories.

### Existing Storefront Space

	Area		Buildings	
	sf	%	#	%
Occupied Storefronts	369,107	74%	154	71%
Vacant Storefronts	126,729	26%	64	29%
Potential Storefront Space	495,836	100%	218	100%

Notes: Occupied Storefronts includes H Street frontage only; does not include non-storefront buildings such as CCM, Library, churches, Hechinger's Mall, & CVS.

## Existing Upper Story Space

	Area		Buildings	
	sf	%	#	%
Occupied Upper Floors	532,681	77%	95	53%
Vacant Upper Floors	159,166	33%	83	47%
Potential Upper Floors	691,847	100%	178	100%

Note: Total occupied upper floor space includes occupied space in DOES, CCM and Self Store buildings. Upper floors in these buildings accounts for almost 400,000 square feet of occupied upper floor space.

## Zoning

The majority of the corridor is zoned C-2 and C-3; the C-2 and C-3 zones allow both commercial and residential development. In addition, small portions of the corridor are zoned C-M-1, a strictly commercial zone, and R-5, a strictly

residential zone. The diagram attached indicates the zoning designation locations and the chart below describes the amount of the land in each zone as defined by the District of Columbia Municipal Regulations.

The majority of the corridor is built well under allowable density, height and other controls. Zoning constraints do not seem to have acted alone as an impediment to development on the corridor as current limits have not been met. As indicated in the following table, development under current zoning would permit approximately double the amount of building area than currently exists.

## Overview of Zone Controls

Zone District	Permitted Intensity (FAR)				
	Commercial Use Only	With Resident'l	Max. Height	% Lot Cover*	Rear Yard
C-2-A	1.5	2.5	50'	60%	15'
C-2-B	1.5	3.5	65'	80%	15'
C-2-C	2.0	6.0	90'	80%	15'
C-3-A	2.5	4.0	65'	75%	12'***
C-M-1	3.0	n/a	40'	N/A	12'****

\*For residential uses.

*\*\*2-1/2 inches per foot of vertical distance from the mean finished grade at the middle of the rear of the structure to the highest point of the main roof or parapet wall, but not less than 12 feet.*

\*\*Above 20 feet; the minimum depth of the rear yard shall be 2.5 in/ft of vertical distance from the mean finished grade at the middle of the rear of the structure to the highest point of the main roof of parapet wall, but not less than 12 ft.

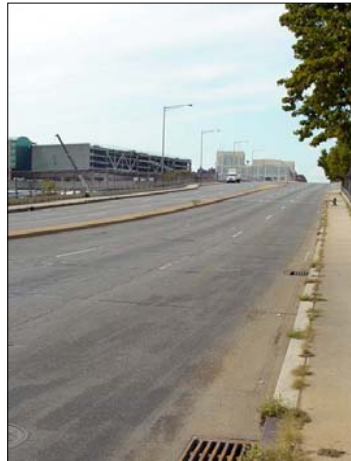
## Overview of Zoned Land

Zone	Individual Parcels		% of Total
District	#	%	Land Area
C-2-A	238	83	35%
C-2-B	2	0.7	7%
C-2-C	1	0.3	6%
C-3-A	38	13	49%
C-M-1	2	0.7	2%
R-5	5	2	0.5%

## Capacity Analysis

<i>Zone District</i>	<i>Existing Area (sf)</i>	<i>Allowable Area (sf)</i>	<i>Underused Area (sf)</i>
R-4	0	8,975	8,975
C-2-A	296,938	578,387	578,449
C-2-B	37,225	182,244	145,019
C-2-C	236,201	218,702	-17,499
C-3-A (H St Frontage)	211,564	393,648	182,084
C-3-A (Hech/Sears)	213,854	1,667,030	1,453,176
C-M-1	0	109,827	109,827
<b>Total</b>	<b>995,782</b>	<b>3,455,813</b>	<b>2,960,031</b>





#### 5.4 Streetscapes & Public Realm

The quality of the public environment has a powerful influence on our perceptions of a place. The public realm—the publicly-owned and controlled spaces between buildings—and the elements that define it—paving materials, street trees, and furnishings—all contribute to our overall impression of place. Streetscapes can be used to define districts and create identifiable places or to tie a linear corridor together to be understood as a single place. Local examples illustrate how streetscape improvements can support place-making and revitalization strategies. For example, the ceremonial arch and streetlights in China Town reinforce the neighborhood's unique heritage and the streetscape improvements along Pennsylvania Avenue reflect the street's symbolic and ceremonial roles as the link between the Capitol and White House.

##### Entries to the Corridor

H Street has distinct eastern and western entries, each presenting opportunities for improvement under the Strategic Development Plan.

**Eastern Entry.** Since the early days of the District, the intersection of H Street, Bladensburg Road, Florida Avenue, Benning Road, 15th Street and Maryland Avenue has been

an important point of entry. Under the L'Enfant Plan, the intersection marked the eastern edge of the new National Capitol and the place where the city grid met the Bladensburg Turnpike, the early link between the District and the cities of Annapolis and Bladensburg.

Over the years, as areas east of the District have grown, the intersection has been reconfigured to serve increases in commuter traffic, especially along Benning Road. Over time, these improvements have tended to favor vehicular rather than pedestrian movements, making the intersection particularly difficult to cross on foot. The current configuration, with its lack of green space, median refuges, and streetscape improvements, creates a significant barrier between the H Street, the surrounding neighborhoods, and Hechinger's Mall.

Fortunately, the L'Enfant Plan provides a useful foundation for thinking about potential improvements to the intersection. As with other sites in the District where diagonal avenues crossed, the intersection was shown on the L'Enfant plan as a hatched circle, suggesting its potential for treatment as a special public place. This potential is highlighted in the National Capitol Planning Commission's recently adopted Monuments and Memorials Plan. The Plan described the intersection as follows:

*A potential commemorative feature at this location could be incorporated within the existing and future site conditions as the intersection of Maryland and Florida Avenues is redesigned. The reconfigured space could provide a landscape setting befitting this important node within the Maryland Avenue Monumental Corridor. Circulations improvements could include a traffic circle that would give a new presence to the existing intersection. This new setting could strengthen community identity while providing a context for a medium size commemorative feature.*

**Western Entry.** The Hopscotch Bridge defines the western end of the corridor. The Bridge, constructed in the 1970's to serve commuter traffic, was constructed in a utilitarian fashion similar to many highway bridges in more suburban settings in the region. The rise of the bridge acts a visual barrier between the H Street corridor and the rest of the City, isolating the neighborhood and contributing to the sense that the street is a mere highway.

The bridge's design as a continuous arch also affects the potential for directly connecting existing and new development to the street. Existing buildings along the bridge, including the Capitol Children's Museum and the office buildings west of the railroad tracks, do not open



directly onto the bridge and views are blocked from lower floors. The continuous slope also presents challenges for the Station Place and Union Station Air Rights developments. The slope limits opportunities for new buildings to open directly onto the bridge and create a more attractive streetscape and comfortable pedestrian environment.

The pedestrian environment on the top of the bridge is stark and inhospitable. The bridge is flanked by high solid protective barriers, giving the bridge a canyon feel with no streetscape, no trees and no activity. The solid barriers on the sides of the bridge have been dressed up with public art, and while this helps by adding color, it does not solve the fundamental problems with the bridge that make this a hostile place for pedestrians, as well as a barrier between the heart of the City and the H Street corridor.

#### **Streetscape Conditions**

There is no clear design of streetscape on the corridor and much of what exists is in disrepair. Street furnishings are either non-existent or inconsistently located. For instance, there is not regular pattern or style of trash receptacles. The lack of trash receptacles contributes to excessive littering that is evident throughout the corridor. There is apparently

not a regular street or walkway sweeping, as the sidewalks are littered. Similarly there is no overall streetscape design concept to guide the location of bus shelters. As a result, a bus shelter was constructed in the center of the circulation path near the Murry's grocery store.

Lighting on the corridor is provided from overhead cobra style streetlights. These fixtures are designed to efficiently light the vehicular travel ways, but do nothing for the pedestrian environment. Smaller scale pedestrian fixtures, which add character and warmth to the walkways, are lacking.

Tree pits are not consistently located, edged or sized. Many tree pits have a metal edge protruding up several inches that is in disrepair, causing tripping hazards. In a few locations, tree grates have been added over the tree pits to improve the walking surface. Although, new street trees (maples, consistent with District policy) have been added to a few areas within the corridor, such as at the H Street Connection; overall the existing trees are in poor condition. There is no consistent spacing of the tree locations; many are missing, dead or dying.

The width of walkways is another important consideration. The walkway widths vary considerably along the corridor for a number of reasons. Block sections include varying sidewalks from approximately 5 to 15 feet, an approximately 9-12 feet wide parking lane, approximately 11 travel lanes. The changing size of parking lanes and sidewalk widths serves no apparent function and results in an inconsistent streetscape. In addition, other intrusions reduce the width of sidewalks, including tree boxes, bay window projections, utility meters, and poorly located bus shelters. In some locations the combination of narrow walkway width and physical intrusions results in walkways that are much too narrow.

The type and condition of the sidewalk paving is also an issue in the corridor. Several different combinations of brick and concrete, solely concrete, or solely brick can be found throughout the corridor. In many areas the walkways are in disrepair and have been haphazardly patched. The sidewalks do not tie the area together with a consistent design concept or material.